Billy and Betty

By Allen Lynn

An Instance of the Good Fortune That Comes Sometimes to Those Who Have Least Reason to Expect It

HE was hardly conscious of her intrusion at first, she fitted so well into it all with her soft gray calico and chestnut hair. They were on the brow of a slope that dropped rapidly down into the valley, and she paused and threw her hand above her eyes with a quick motion, which he recognized as expressing anxiety and hope. He could see her face plainly from where he lay, and he could read in the glances which flashed from point to point something of the terror of their owner at not finding what she sought.

"What is it, Miss Betty?" he drawled as with a slow, muscular movement of his body he threw himself upon his feet and moved forward to her side. "Can I be any help?"

"O-oh! It's you, Billy? Thank God! Hurry! Hurry! Pap's knocked down by a tree an' being crushed. I couldn't lift it."

"Where?" asked Billy tersely.

"To Possum Flat. He was choppin' a bee tree, an' it fell 'fore he thought. Please, please do hurry!"

Billy nodded reassuringly. Possum Flat was three miles away by a circuitous path around craggy points and up and down declivities or one mile by going straight over the ridge and meeting a precipice by crawling out on a branch for twenty feet and sliding down the tree trunk for thirty feet more. Billy wondered if Betty had come by this route. But as he sprang up the slope he swung his hand toward the circuitous path, knowing full well as he did so, however, that the girl would do exactly as she pleased, for that was her way.

Possum Flat was the wonder and chagrin of all the mountain side, for was it not the climax of brazen industry? They all had their truck patches, but beside Possum Flat their patches were as barren fields to a land of milk and honey. Jake, the father of Betty—as he was called in contradistinction to another Jake of the same name, who was father of Meg—grew potatoes that stood him from the October digging to the May planting. His onions and cabbages were always above family needs and flowed over into envied sales for ready money, and, to cap it all, behind his cabin was a four acre field that every fall showed green with sprouting shoots and every spring grew heavy with swaying, golden headed wheat. No wonder he had two mules and a buckboard "kerridge," a "peazer" in front of his cabin and a kitchen with real window glass windows behind! And no wonder he carried his head high as the mighty man of the "hillers" and looked askance at the valorous "pore trash" youth that dared to raise eyes to his daughter. But of unambitious, care free Billy he had not even thought as an object of suspicion.

So now, after that stalwart youth had removed the heavy tree trunk from his body and had lifted and borne him to his bed in the cabin as gently as a mother might her child, he welcomed with cordial gratitude an offer to remain and look after things until he could get out. Betty was strong and willing, but her hands would be full in looking after him, and there were the mules to care for and the dozens of pigs and a cow to drive up from the valley and milk, and besides it was high time the four acres were again seeded in order that there should be

"PAP'S KNOCKED DOWN BY A TREE."

a succession to the sacks of golden grain which were now stored in the shed loft waiting for the higher quotations which rumor promised. Yes, a strong man was needed on the place, for Possum Flat, even in its splendor, was isolated. The nearest neighbor was too far away to be reached by even the report of his rifle.

Billy entered upon his new work with unwonted energy. A great heap of wood was cut and piled near the back door, where it would be handy for Betty. He brought water and fed the pigs and, in spite of her protests, insisted on doing the milking himself, and he brought the big, unwieldy plow and swung it in behind the mules and went merrily around the four acre lot in lessening parallelograms.

It was the novelty of seeing a woman about that was pleasant. He had no sisters, and his mother had long been dead. It was just the novelty and the neatness and contentedness of it all he liked. And this idea, if his thoughts took such definite form, remained with him for a month—until the invalid began to hobble about on crutches—when suddenly the truth came home to him as had her beauty that day on the ridge. Billy was in love.

Betty noticed the change in him at once, and her face grew puzzled, but only for a little while. Then an odd twinkle of humor came into her eyes as though she understood. And mingled with the humor was a tender, flickering light which had been gaining strength in her eyes these past few weeks, a light which Billy had not yet seen.

As he entered Jake looked up with angry impatience, and Billy raised a hand defensively before his face, but the invalid was not thinking of that.

"Heered anything 'bout wheat today?" he grumbled. "Goin' down, of course."

"Goin' up," Billy answered promptly. "A man hollered to me from the alge o' the hill this mornin' an' said 'twas seventy."

"Seventy!" Jake grabbed his crutches and rose totteringly to his feet, but sank back, with a snarl of mingled rage and pain. "Seventy cents, an' I've got ninety bushels. Dum the old back! By the time I'm out ag'in it'll be down to fifty, like 'twas last year, an' that'll be a clean loss of $18."

"Can't I go, pap?" suggested Betty.

The gloomy face cleared slightly, then lowered. He loved the profits of his industry, but not so much as he loved Betty. It was thirty miles to Staunton.

"No, ye can't," he snarled.

There was a brief silence. Then Betty said:

"There's Billy, pap. He's mighty strong an' willin'."

The face darkened, then grew lighter. Evidently the idea, at first scouted, was being tolerated. That meant Billy had been making giant strides forward during these few weeks.

"I—dunno," doubtfully.

Billy saw his opportunity and rose to it like a man—like a man of industry. He was developing rapidly.

"I'll take it down all right," he said confidently. "I've sold wheat to Staunton afore. But mebbe it'll be worth while to hold back till you're out ag'in."

Jake snorted.

"There's more fallin's than risin's in wheat," he snapped. "I've found that out. I reckon ye'd better go, and, mind, I want ye to get it all down by tomorrow. Seventy cents! Yes, ye must get it all in tomorrow."

Billy's head was whirling. But there was Betty looking at him confidently, and her father already beginning to lose some of his newly acquired confidence. He must brace up

"All right," he answered as steadily as he could. "The mules can draw half on the long waggin, an' I'll borry Tom Stuart's mule an' Ike Coyner's hay waggin. That'll take the other half. Ike's boy Sam can drive behind me so I can keep an eye on him. Oh, yes. We'll get on fust rate."

Jake nodded approvingly. It was a good plan.

"Seventy cents," he admonished warningly. "Try an' get it."

After the wheat was loaded the next day Billy entered the cabin for a few last instructions. Before leaving he contrived to draw Betty into the back kitchen for a moment.

"Say, Betty," he began, "I—I—say,

"GOIN' UP," BILLY ANSWERED PROMPTLY.

would ye mind me buyin' a ring to Staunton, a gold ring for you an' me?"

She looked at him quickly, understandingly, her face flushing. She could not remember a single one of her married acquaintances who had been given a gold ring.

"Why, no, I wouldn't mind, Billy," she said simply. "I'll be real glad."

"An'—an' would ye mind speakin' to your pap 'bout it while I'm gone, Betty? It might be a good time now I'm a-totin' his wheat."

"N-no, I don't mind."

She watched him from the doorway until the heavy wagons rumbled out of sight. Then she went to her father

"Pap," she announced abruptly, "Billy's asked me to marry him."

"An' you?"

"I've said yes," composedly.

Jake controlled himself with a mighty effort. With Betty he must be diplomatic.

"Well, ye know best," he grimaced affably. "But ye know how 'tis with Billy. Ye'll have to wait till he's able to keep ye. I don't reckon he's saved enough to buy a runt pig yet."

But Betty smiled to herself contentedly. Was not Billy the best natured and the best looking man on the slope? And had he not promised her a gold ring out of the plenitude of his riches? So she said softly:

"I won't go ag'in ye, pap. Don't ye fear. We'll wait till ye say yourself that Billy's able to keep me."

But, curiously enough, at that very moment Billy was wondering dismally how he would be able to contrive the purchase of a gold ring with the 25 cents which represented the accumulation of his twenty-five years.

They expected him back by the end of the third day. It was the afternoon of the sixth when he returned. As he dismissed young Sam and attended to his mules there was a look of beatific joy upon his face, which remained there until he opened the cabin door and saw the expectant face of Jake. Then he whitened and staggered to the nearest chair.

"You poor boy!" cried Betty tenderly. "You're plumb beat out."

"Did ye get the 70 cents?" demanded Jake eagerly.

Billy gasped and tried to collect his thoughts. What did they want him to say? It was about the wheat, wasn't it? He had almost forgotten that unimportant matter after the gold ring took possession of his mind. He remembered the wheat had been taken to the storeroom of a big flouring mill and that he had told a clerk he would be back later and attend to its sale. Then he had hurried away in search of a job hauling with the mules and had carted sand two days for $6 and had bought the gold ring. Yes, that was it, and he had given Sam the 25 cents to pay his fare to a cousin's at Fisherville to get him out of the way for the two days. That was all—only he had forgotten to go back and sell the wheat.

"Did ye get the 70 cents?" demanded Jake for the second time.

Billy felt that it was a crisis with him, and he drew a long, hard breath. Then his gaze steadied.

"Ye see, it's this way," he said, "signs are for risin', an' I ain't sold yet. Ye might jest as well have 75 or 80 cents as for anybody else. But I'll go down"—he was about to say "to oncet," but restrained himself, for that might betray him; he added instead—"in a few days an' see how the risin's comin' on."

Under ordinary circumstances the invalid would not have controlled his astonishment and wrath, but this was an extraordinary opportunity, and Jake, the father of Betty, was nothing if not diplomatic. So he forced himself into a semblance of composure.

"Well, it's your lookout, Billy," he said significantly. "I ordered ye to sell, an' of course I'll hold ye responsible for all fallin's from the 70 cents. Mind that!"

"THE RISIN' WAS EVEN BETTER THAN I 'LOWED ON."

It was a very miserable Billy who went out to attend to the evening chores. He had half a mind to rush back to Staunton and remedy the evil before it grew worse. He imagined all sorts of fallings—to 60 cents, 50, perhaps 40; to a life of toil spent in atoning for the carelessness; to the probable loss of Betty. But he stuck it out until the third morning. Then he left the cabin with steady, confident strides, which, however, changed to frantic haste as soon as he was beyond view of Betty in the doorway.

But the mills of the gods sometimes turn out unaccountable grist. Every moment since Billy had been told from the hill that wheat was "goin' up" the mills of the Chicago pit had been grinding out good flour for his chaff; the west had been scoured, the markets of the world invoked and the many tongued lines of telegraph brought into the game. And all had redounded to the honor and glory of Billy of Coon Hill. When he returned to Possum Flat at the end of one short twenty-four hours his face was again expressive of beatific joy.

Going straight to Jake, the father of Betty, he handed him a roll of bills.

"The risin' was even better than I 'lowed on," he said nonchalantly. "I sold for $1 a bushel. Ye see, there was signs o' breaking, an' I 'lowed I'd better not hold on any longer."

There are varying signs of wonder, chagrin, incredulity and satisfaction, but the mingling of them all which gathered on Jake's face was of the kind that cannot be put into words. He gazed at the money, at the strong, handsome figure before him; at Betty, smiling a few feet away, and bowed his head in surrender.

"I reckon I might 'a' been mistook, Betty," he said submissively. "Billy'll be able to keep ye, sure 'nough."

WHAT THE EDITOR WANTED.

The following instructions are sent to correspondents by the editor of an American paper:

"Our country correspondents are requested to write briefly and to the point in preparing their accounts of 'quiet weddings.' They may, however, consider themselves at perfect liberty to spread themselves in giving details of any uproarious weddings that may occur to break the monotony in their respective neighborhoods.

"We further wish them to remember that a groom attired in 'the conventional black' is sufficiently covered without any description of his dress, but a groom married in tar and feathers is worthy of special rates and a full column with headlines. If the 'happy couple' then depart, they should be permitted to go without saying, but should they begin to pull hair before the minister has got out of hearing we want all the particulars.

"If the table 'groans,' let it groan, but if any of the guests choke to death on the 'collation' it will be a serious matter with our special correspondent if we don't get complete and early returns. What we want is news that is news."

MARRY A DOLL.

The superstition that it is unlucky for a girl to marry a man who has been married twice before led to a curious ceremony at Badaon, in the United Provinces, India. A merchant who wished to marry for the third time first went through the ceremony of marrying a doll, which he carried in his arms. The doll, which was regarded as his third "wife," was then buried with great pomp, after which the real marriage ceremony took place.

PLEASURE AND PROFIT FOR WIDEAWAKE YOUNG FOLKS

Bumblebees In Clover

By Alberta Platt

"BURLY, dozing, humblebee!
Where thou art is clime for me,"

quoted the little old gentleman quaintly as the big brown insect ornately streaked with gold went lumbering by on its gauzy wings.

The picnic party looked at him.

"Dear, dear! You mustn't say such things," remonstrated the hostess plaintively. "Just think of its effects on the children. Bumblebees sting."

Uncle Ben repeated the prohibited lines roguishly, and Toddlekins lisped after him, "Burry, ozie mumlejee," which was about as near as Toddlekins could come to an imitation.

THE BEE SETTLED ON THE CLOVER BLOSSOM.

"Now, see what you've done," reproached Mrs. Bright. "Oh, children, you must keep out of the way of the bumblebees or they may sting you dreadfully."

Another bee came sailing leisurely along, now stopping to investigate a weed, now hovering over a tall sheaf of grass. Uncle Ben stooped, picked up a clover blossom and held it invitingly toward the noisy wanderer. With a flutter of its bronze wings the creature settled upon the flower and plunged its head deep in one of the crimson cups. It drank long and deeply of the honey, as befitted a thirsty bee on a sultry day, and then it drew up its crest and floated away through the yellow afternoon sunshine.

A sigh of pleased appreciation from the children followed this performance, while Mrs. Bright groaned her disapproval.

"Mumlejee don' bite Unka Ben," was Toddlekins' sage comment, and the little old man laughed.

"Bumblebees only bite bad boys and girls who tease them," he replied. "Let's go down into the meadow and see them banqueting on clover."

As he led the way the children came tumbling after him, casting over their shoulders to their mother, who remained in the hammock, many a reassuring promise in payment of the reluctant consent which they had wrung from her.

When they reached the meadow, they found it covered with red clover, around which an army of brown bumblebees buzzed in an ecstasy of delight.

"My! You'd think bumblers liked clover," was Harold's comment.

Uncle Ben nodded assent.

"They do," he said. "They like it so well that when they can have red clover they scorn any other diet. Once upon a time some farmers tried to grow red clover in a new country where there were no bumblebees. The clover pined and dwindled away. The government set experts to work to see why it did not grow. The red clover was nursed as tenderly as a prize orchid. Finally one bright scientist—he had probably once been a farmer's lad and had seen red clover growing in the fields at home—suggested that a few bumblebees be imported and turned loose in the clover field. He said he had never seen a field of red clover that was not frequented by swarms of busy bumblebees. Well, the bees arrived and were turned loose in the clover, which had been especially sowed for their benefit. The plants were already in bloom, and with a vim those bees went to work. My, how they did eat and how that

THE SCIENTIST CHASED THE CAT.

clover field grew! The government experts stood about and grinned, and the scientist who had suggested the importation of the bees looked complacent and said, 'I told you so.' Now the farmers could raise red clover in that country, and consequently their cattle grew strong and fat, and the people have good beef to eat.

"After awhile the farmers began to complain that their clover was not doing so well and that the bumblebees seemed to be disappearing. Could it be the insects did not like the climate? The bright scientist ran hither and thither distractedly, and the other experts looked grave and shook their heads. Some of them even said that they had been a little doubtful about the plan from the first. One morning the scientist noticed a huge cat stalking about the clover field and sniffing at holes in the ground. Presently puss poked out his paw and gathered something out of the grass. The scientist shuddered and said 'Scat!' very emphatically, for he had a hereditary dislike for cats. Puss promptly scatted, for he belonged to an elderly maiden lady and had an acquired antipathy for all persons of the male sex. To make sure that the obnoxious cat had departed, the scientist chased it to the edge of the field and saw it jump over the fence and rush into a little white cottage across the road.

"Presently a piercing scream burst from the cottage and cries of 'Help! Help!' in a shrill feminine voice. Gallantly vaulting over the fence the scientist hastened to the cottage door, which stood ajar. He saw a thin, angular lady of middle age perched upon a table with her skirts gathered at a rather indecorous height above her ankles. The cat crouched upon the floor contemplating a small gray object that occasionally squeaked and moved feebly. 'Save me!' screeched the lady as soon as she spied the man at the door. 'Oh, take it away!' The scientist naturally supposed she meant the cat and raised his boot to eject it with a fierce 'Get out, you brute!' The lady yelled so much louder that the cat fled in a panic, and the scientist, seeing that her cries did not abate, turned his attention to the object on the floor. 'Why, it's nothing but a mouse,' he observed in disgust. 'Well, if that isn't just like a woman.'

"He hastily stowed the mouse out of sight in his pocket and helped the lady down from the table. Then she explained to him how her adored Thomas had taken to evil courses, bringing in half a dozen mice a day, so that she lived in a constant state of terror. 'Where he gets them I don't know, for I have none on the premises,' she sighed. The scientist knew, but he had no time to waste on her and returned to the field, just in time to see Thomas capture another mouse. When he went home he happened upon the dead mouse still in his pocket, and as he was in his laboratory and had a few spare moments he decided to dissect the little animal. Imagine his surprise when the lancet had laid open the mouse's stomach to discover in it several partly digested bumblebees. Several times that day he caught field mice, and every little mouse stomach was found to contain bumblebees.

"A large sum of money had been offered by the government to the person who would make the red clover grow successfully, so the bright man thought of a bright scheme. That very night he went round and proposed to the owner of the cat. Shortly afterward he began to lay in a stock of cats. Wherever he could find a stray or discarded cat he adopted it until the cottage swarmed with them. People began to talk, and his fellow scientists, who were well acquainted with his antipathy for felines, began poking suspiciously around. The scientist knew that if he was not careful they would soon smell a mouse, for there were scarcely five minutes when one of his cats was not running home with one.

SCIENCE IS AT LAST SUCCESSFUL.

"In time the bumblebee colony began to do finely, and the red clover picked up in a magical manner, and the scientist pocketed the award. Field mice, he discovered, were the great enemies of bumblebees. The bees are needed to carry the pollen for fertilizing the clover blossoms from plant to plant."

"Is that so, Uncle Ben?" asked little Mina wonderingly.

"Perfectly true in the main," Uncle Ben answered soberly. "I made up only that part about the spinster lady. In Australia they once had just about such a time with their clover fields."

THE TORTOISE'S BREAKFAST.

Here's a sketch, specially made for you at the zoo, of a tortoise having his breakfast. "Cabbage this morning—that's good!" he says to himself. "But I do hope they've remembered to put a carrot or two somewhere in the pile,

and I should rather fancy an onion to finish up with!"

Tortoises live to be ever so old—more than 100 years old—nearly 200 years sometimes. And they can go without food much longer than you and I could. If there happens to be no breakfast and no dinner and no tea, "Never mind," says Mr. Tortoise, "I'll wait till tomorrow." And if there's nothing tomorrow either, he tucks his head and feet and tail inside the shell and settles down to wait until next week.

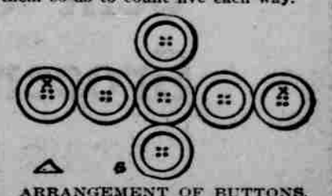
Tortoises don't like sunshine. A dark corner where the sun never comes pleases them best.

JAPANESE BABIES.

A baby's age can be told in Japan by the arrangement of the hair, which will be either in a tuft at the back of the neck or a bunch left in front when all the rest of the head is shaved. Girls of eight or nine in Japan wear their hair in a bow at the back of the head wound round with red crape. The front is left plain, except two locks which dangle at the sides.

A BUTTON TRICK.

Arrange seven buttons as they are in the illustration and then rearrange them so as to count five each way.



ARRANGEMENT OF BUTTONS.

Method.—Put the two outside buttons upon the center one.